

Rockville 2010 Citizen Survey
Department Responses

Each City department completed a brief review of the results of the 2010 Citizen Survey. This document includes highlights from the survey results by department and initial thoughts on possible actions.

The results are positive and reflect our strong focus on maintaining basic services and our physical infrastructure without adding new positions. With flattened revenues, we must become even more efficient by shifting resources from lower priority to higher priority services and improving our use of technology.

CITY MANAGER

The City Manager's Office identified the following highlights and possible actions in response to the 2010 Citizen Survey results.

1. Broad measures of the quality of the City services, the Rockville community and customer service remain high

According to the survey, 93% of respondents rate the quality of life as excellent or good, 85% rate the overall quality of services as excellent or good, and 82% rate the overall appearance of the community as excellent or good. Other measures such as sense of community, quality of neighborhoods, Rockville as a place to raise children and a place to retire have increased or remained consistent.

The rating of the overall quality of customer service provided by city employees improved between 2008 and 2010. The percent of respondents rating overall customer service as excellent or good increased from 76% in 2008 to 83% in 2010. The other measures of customer service included in the citizen survey also improved between 2008 and 2010:

Percent of respondents rating their impression of City government employees in their most recent contact as "Excellent" or "Good"	2008	2010
Courtesy	81%	87%
Knowledge	82%	86%
Responsiveness	74%	81%
Follow up	69%	77%

In response to these improvements, we will continue our emphasis on educating new and current employees on the City's customer service standards. We will also continue quarterly recognition of employees who exhibit exceptional customer service.

2. 69% of respondents agree or strongly agree that the city government welcomes citizen involvement

The 2010 results indicate that 69% of respondents strongly agree or agree that the City of Rockville government welcomes citizen involvement. Another 24% neither agree nor disagree and 6% disagree or strongly disagree. In 2008, 71% strongly agreed or agreed that the government welcomed citizen involvement, 22% neither agreed or disagreed, and 7% disagreed or strongly disagreed. While the 2010 rating is “much above” the results in other communities across the country, this is an area worth exploring and for improvement.

The City continually seeks resident involvement on boards, commissions and task forces. We also involve residents by seeking their input on topics such as master and neighborhood plans, branding, the budget, and development projects (pre-application meetings, etc). Citizen involvement is a core value and is factored into all City programs, projects and initiatives.

There may be value in exploring this survey result further. It helps us to have residents involved, but it appears we have not been completely successful in identifying how to involve them or how to communicate ways to be involved. Gaining a better understanding of how residents want to be involved and how best to reach out to them could help us improve this measure over time. Rockville Reports, Rockville 11, and Neighborhood Resources can be used with greater effectiveness to invite and facilitate citizen involvement.

3. The percent of respondents reporting that they visited the City’s website increased from 27% in 2001 to 66% in 2010

This data reinforces our understanding that the web is an increasingly important source of information for our residents and supports our decisions to improve the website. We’ve done a lot of work already to make the web a better resource, such as change the look of the home page, update the news on the home page daily, “housecleaning” of the pages.

Our request for FY12 funds to redesign the website also responds to this citizen survey result. The goal of the redesign is to further increase the percent of residents that use the site and give them a better experience on the site. The survey includes data on five specific “aspects of the city website”, including ease of navigation and appearance. The project to redesign the site should result in higher ratings of those aspects of the site in future citizen surveys.

The key driver analysis shows us which service areas to focus our improvement efforts. Since the web site is a key driver, targeting improvements to the web site has a greater likelihood of improving opinions about overall service quality.

4. When asked to think about the amount of information they receive on 15 different City government functions or activities, approximately 4 in 10 respondents felt that they do not get enough information from the City about future development in Rockville, City construction projects and public safety.

This survey result leads the CMO to increase communication on topics that respondents indicated they do not receive enough information. Because respondents indicate they prefer to

receive information in Rockville Reports and on our web site, these will be important tools in increasing awareness of development, city construction projects and public safety. Communication resources will be re-allocated accordingly.

In particular, the communication division will increase communication about public safety, as it is a key driver. Recreation programming is also a key driver, so it will be important to improve the effectiveness of our communication about these services.

COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

The Department of Community Planning and Development Services staff completed a brief review of the results of the 2010 Citizen Survey. Below are highlights and our initial thoughts on possible actions.

Some ratings are directly related to CPDS work. There are many other rankings that are of interest to us in a general planning sense, but are not our primary operational responsibility, and are not noted here for this purpose. Examples of these are issues such as: ease of travel by bicycle; ease of travel by walking; street lighting; Rockville as a place to retire; safety in your neighborhood, business areas etc. However, all of these types of issues should be discussed as part of our planning and development review processes, and we should take note of them.

The following evaluations come from a statistical comparison of Rockville's rating to the benchmark:

Much Above the Benchmark:

- Building Permit Process
- Quality of new residential development
- Quality of new commercial development
- Pleased with overall direction City is taking
- Government welcomes citizen involvement
- Government listens to its residents
- Overall appearance of Rockville
- Overall quality of life in Rockville
- Overall quality of neighborhood

Those living east of Rt. 355 tended to give lower ratings to the quality of new residential development than those living in the other two areas. Those living west of I-270 tended to give higher ratings to the quality of new commercial development than did those living other locations.

Below the Benchmark:

- Availability of affordable housing

Much more than the Benchmark:

- Population growth seen as too fast

The City has grown! According to the US Census, the City of Rockville population increased from 473,88 to 61,209 between 2000 and 2010. That is 13,821 or 29% more residents in 2010 than in 2000.

King Farm and Falls Grove have built out over the past ten years; Town Square was completed, as have the multi-family apartments on Hungerford Drive, north of the Town Center, and at Veirs Mill Road/1st Street and further south Congressional Plaza, Congressional South. Twinbrook Station is underway.

Questions for further research are:

- How much of the population growth is from annexed areas (King Farm, Falls Grove) and how much is from within our previous borders?
- How much growth is from new development, and how much is from demographic shift?

More than the Benchmark:

- Experiencing housing costs stress (housing costs 30% or MORE of income)

Two-fifths of respondents reported spending more than 30% of their monthly household income on housing. Factors influencing this response may include the length of time survey respondents have lived in the same house, age of respondents etc. This is a topic that we should look at in more depth.

Much less than the Benchmark:

- Retail growth seen as too slow
- Jobs growth seen as too slow

Additional survey findings relevant to CPDS include:

Strong and Distinctive Neighborhoods

Housing, development [and property maintenance code enforcement] ratings have remained stable over time.

Urban Sensitivity

Respondents were happy with the maintenance of Town Center and report visiting Town Center. 93% of respondents reported visiting the Town Center at least once in the last 12 months. NRC concludes, "The newly developed Rockville Town Center is appreciated and used."

Engaged Governance

Residents continue to show trust and confidence in their local government and its officials.

Business Friendly

Residents thought the City does a good job with the building permit process and providing planning and zoning information.

- About 6 in 10 gave “excellent” or “good” ratings to the quality of the building permit process and providing planning and zoning information.
- Those living west of I-270 tended to give higher ratings to both the above issues than did those living in other locations.

This is an area of strength for CPDS. However, 20% or more of respondents said “don’t know” when responding to questions about building permits, planning and zoning.

In the open-ended comments, we took note of the comment that the city’s web site is hard to use for permitting purposes. Improving the web site and creating additional opportunities for the public to navigate the permitting process has become a priority for the department. We expect that service improvements will be in place in the upcoming fiscal year that will allow the public to engage the department more effectively via the web and other means.

Jobs growth was believed to be “too slow” while the rate of retail growth was the “right amount.” 20% or more of respondents said “don’t know” when responding to Jobs growth. However, the finding that a much smaller proportion of Rockville residents found growth in these areas to be “too slow” than in other parts of the county, speaks to the relative strength of the economy in the Washington DC metro area.

Multimodal Transportation

Ease of travel in Rockville received favorable assessments. Respondents felt safe crossing the street in Rockville, with those west of I-270 feeling safer than those living between I-270 and Rt. 355 or east of Rt. 355.

Exceptional City Services and Amenities

The overall quality of City services received positive reviews.

Quality Environment

Many thought that the City does a good job protecting and preserving the natural environment.

POLICE DEPARTMENT

The Police Department completed a brief review of the results of the 2010 Citizen Survey. Below are significant results and a preliminary response.

Significant Results

Police services continue to be a key driver and core service for the City of Rockville. A review of the statistics from this past year's survey indicates that 77% of the community felt that the overall police services were either excellent or good. This is a decrease of one percent from the 78% rating received in 2008.

In two specific areas of crime prevention and traffic enforcement, respondents felt that these services were either good or excellent with rating scores of 72% and 73% respectively.

In response to the survey questions about feeling safe while walking in your neighborhood, 97% stated that they felt either very safe, reasonably safe or somewhat safe during the day, with 87% in the top two categories and 90% responded in the same manner while walking in neighborhoods during the nighttime hours, with 65% in the top two categories of very safe or reasonably safe. The same held true for the nighttime hours, with 96% feeling very safe, reasonably safe or somewhat safe in business areas during the daytime, with 83% being in the top two categories, and 88% felt the same way during the nighttime hours, with 56% being in the top two categories.

Overall, the police services were rated as similar to the national norm.

In the Code Enforcement areas, residential property maintenance code enforcement continues to be rated above the national norm, while commercial property maintenance code enforcement received a rating similar to the national norm.

Although these results still continue to be positive and encouraging, they are not at the level that we would like them to be. In particular we need to analyze and determine the root causes for the perception of concern for safety while walking at night, particularly in the business areas.

As always, we try to look at what salient factors may impact the ratings and help us understand how to plan for better results in future surveys:

Having Two Police Departments in the City:

Both the City and County Police maintain active patrol units within City limits and handle calls-for-service. Even though these are two separate and distinct police agencies, citizens and/or business owners simply do not differentiate between the responses to calls-by-service from two different police agencies and rate the City Police on all police interactions.

The Continued Urbanization of the City of Rockville:

With continued higher density, both in building mass and population, comes additional public safety issues and concerns. The City of Rockville has become increasingly urban in nature over the past five years, with many larger city-type public safety issues and concerns. Certainly, the continued conflict between pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists sharing traffic areas, and the highly publicized levels of motorists versus pedestrian collisions does impact one's feeling of safety. The continued increase in both density and transient populations in and around our metro stops and centers also contributes to an increase in urban type criminal and public safety issues (juvenile upon juvenile assaults, traffic congestion, thefts from motor vehicles, etc.).

Having one major college, five high schools, two middle schools, nine elementary schools and another half dozen parochial schools within city limits, intertwined into both business and residential areas, causes impact in pedestrian and motorist congestion and problems.

The continued success of the Town Center area, with an increased level of nightlife activity, also impacts upon public safety issues and response.

Preliminary Department Response:

In continued efforts to improve the safety and the perception of safety, we will continue to concentrate efforts in the following areas:

Community Outreach:

Use of list-serves, news releases, neighborhood and business watch presentations, public meetings, and other avenues of public outreach will continue. We will continue our outreach efforts such as our statistic booklets which are completed on a monthly basis for all participating homeowner and neighborhood civic associations, continue to ensure timely notifications to specific neighborhoods on items of interest and/or issues, maintain a continued attendance at civic events, maintain high visibility patrol and traffic mitigation efforts, provide strong code enforcement information, outreach, and enforcement, and continue to ensure a quick response to animal control concerns.

We have initiated several new programs over the last year, such as the Motorist, Bicyclist and Pedestrian Safety Campaign, the Safety in the Parks Presentations Program, Timely Crime Watch bulletins, Safety Tips sent out with weekly media releases, and the reestablishment and deployment of a Field Services Street Crime Unit.

Even though there was a significant reduction in overall crime statistics from 2008 to 2010 (28% reduction overall in Part I and Part II crimes), it is felt that the community really does not feel the same way. This can possibly be attributed to being part of the Metropolitan Washington Area, with numerous media outlets constantly reporting on crime issues. It is believed that the constant reporting of crime news impacts our citizens/ residents both directly and indirectly. An example would be the recent reporting juvenile assaults on Metro trains. Even though these incidents have

occurred outside the City of Rockville, citizens/ residents are impacted because many do use the Metro rail system daily.

In Montgomery County, many times there are new articles released by the Montgomery County Police Department about a crime that occurred in Rockville. More often than not, the crime reported is in a section of Rockville outside of the City Limits, but still has the Rockville tagline.

The Police Department, in concert and collaboration with the City Public Information Office, must maintain vigilance to ensure that the public is provided with a continued flow of public safety information, reporting issues, announcing a successful conclusion to investigations, highly publicized community outreach programs (such as the Drug Take-Back program, Home and Business Security Survey program, Citizen Ride-alongs, etc.)

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

The Department of Public Works staff has completed a brief review of the results of the 2010 Citizen Survey. Below are our initial thoughts on possible actions.

Snow and Ice Removal

From the 2010 Citizen Survey:

While ratings were similar the national benchmark, the quality of snow and ice removal received one of the low evaluations of all services. It also was the only service to see a decline in ratings from 2008 to 2010. In addition, snow and ice removal was identified as a key driver of overall service quality, therefore the City might want to focus its attention and resources on improvements to this service.

The survey results were undoubtedly affected by the blizzards of 2010 and the overall heavy snowfall; regardless it is clear that citizens want improvements. We now face the challenge of what to do to improve. While the storms of 2010 are considered historic, residents will likely not be satisfied during future snow storms if the City did not “learn our lessons” from the 2010 storms.

We have already taken several measures to make improvements:

- Revised routes and pre-storm planning.
- Awarded contingency contracts.
- Began installing fire hydrant markers citywide.
- Changed the City Code.

We also have proposed a few additional low-cost enhancements in the FY12 budget:

- Upgrade two dump trucks due for replacement to larger capacity trucks to:
 - Provide over three times the salt hauling capacity of current trucks, which allows for more road treatment without returning to reload.

- Provide more complete clearing of multilane roads during higher snow events due to the larger plow and greater pushing capability. This also results in reduced need for time consuming loader and snow-hauling operations to open heavily buried lanes.
- Provide greater capacity during snow hauling operations.
- Provide limited emergency self-hauling of bulk salt from suppliers when contractual capabilities fall short.
- Purchase five saltboxes and six plows installed on existing 4x4 pickup trucks to provide for capability for courts and tighter streets and two existing small dump trucks, which will increase the route coverage to 20 routes instead of the existing 18.
- Implement pre-treating program (salt brine and/or beet juice blend), including a list of primary roads that will be pre-treated when appropriate.
- Purchase Salt Brine Manufacturing System, allowing us to make salt brine on-site and saving money over the use of a contractor, which has limited capability and effectiveness.

However, this still may not fully address the challenges. We need to continue exploring other alternatives and monitor satisfaction.

Street Lighting

From the Survey, this is the lowest scoring City service. Streetlights is still similar to the benchmark, but this is despite concentrated efforts in this area after the 2008 Survey.

- Sixty percent of respondents rated street lighting as excellent or good (compared to 62% in 2008), while only 10 percent said poor.
- A rating of 54 was given to streetlights in this survey, which is the same rating in both of the last two surveys, 2007 and 2008.
- East of 355 gave the lowest rating of all of the sections of Rockville; this area is primarily served by Pepco lights on wooden poles; therefore, Pepco does all of the maintenance in this area.

Suggested ways to improve street lighting in general:

- Work with Pepco to upgrade or replace underground cabling in areas where we have frequent outages.
- Re-evaluate processes that involve Pepco to see if the City can improve or expedite such things as new street light requests or no voltage repairs.
- Cut tree branches that interfere with street lights. PEPCO's plan to trim trees more aggressively along its overhead power lines may also help the visibility of street lights mounted on PEPCO poles, but additional trimming by City Forestry Division may be needed. Additional funding for the Forestry Division to systematically evaluate and trim trees that interfere with street lights should be considered.
- Have staff make bi-monthly night surveys to spot outages; survey routes should be driven and documented.
- Hire an additional technician to improve response time to outages.

- Create a street light inventory so staff knows the types and ages of parts, and can track repairs and upgrades more efficiently, as well as track the frequency of outages for specific lights. This also would be used to plan street light CIP projects.

Suggestions for future Citizen Surveys:

- Staff recommends that the next survey be more specific for street lighting, or another survey tool be used, to help identify the specific issues. Possible questions (or check points) could be:
 - Do you feel the City provides a sufficient quantity of street lights?
 - Do you feel the brightness of existing street lights is adequate?
 - Do you feel that trees interfere with street lights?
 - Do you feel the number of street light outages is too many, acceptable, etc.?
 - Do you feel the City's response rate for street light repairs is excellent, very good, etc?
- If all these questions could be identified by areas of the City (east, west, etc.) it would be helpful to point a specific problem in a specific area.
- It would be helpful to differentiate between Pepco lights and City lights, but we have no recommendation for how to accomplish that at this time.

Drinking Water Quality

From the 2010 Citizen Survey:

Ratings were below or less than the national benchmark data.

- Create a survey for inclusion in City water bills (this would eliminate responses from Rockville residents who are WSSC customers) to further pinpoint the customers' issues/concerns.
- Fashion a series of features in Rockville Reports, on Channel 11, and on the City Web site to inform and educate customers with respect to things they can do to improve the taste of water, current issues in the world of water and how it relates to City water customers, ongoing and new techniques being used in Rockville, and other issues or concerns revealed by the water bill survey.
- Incorporate taste into the Water Quality Program, including researching other techniques to improve taste.

DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION AND PARKS

The Department of Recreation and Parks staff has completed a brief review of the results of the 2010 Citizen Survey. Below are important findings and related action items.

Five important findings by the Recreation and Parks Department:

1. Two of the six key drivers were Recreational programs and Maintenance of Town Center.
2. 93% rated the quality of life in Rockville as good or excellent despite economic downturn.

3. Employee customer service has improved and is "much above" the national benchmark in knowledge, responsiveness, follow-up and overall customer service.
4. Funding to enhance and expand existing recreational facilities received 38%. This is 9 percentage points higher than the next category.
5. Although still much above the national benchmark, there was a significant reduction in ratings of "Senior Citizen Programs and Services," particularly on the East side of the City.

Action Items:

1. To address that services to youth declined significantly from 2008 rating. Improve relationships with the schools to identify programs and services in the non-school hours. Identify and support programs for youth including those at risk for obesity, crime and isolation.
2. Increase marketing efforts regarding the opportunities for both passive and programmed activities in Recreation and Parks facilities.
3. Continue to emphasize the importance of beautiful parks, streets, facilities and public spaces in the quality of life Rockville residents enjoy.
4. Continue to emphasize the importance of consistent, excellent customer service.